



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

April 7, 2005

News Release

U.S. CHARGES FOUR IN EXTENSIVE INTERNATIONAL ALIEN SMUGGLING OPERATION

New York, NY- Salvatore Dalessandro, the Acting Special Agent in Charge of the New York Office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that NIRANJAN MAAN SINGH, also known as “Jit Narinder Singh,” and RAMESH PATEL, who are alleged to have been leaders of an extensive international alien smuggling operation, were brought to New York last night to face criminal charges. After being deported from Venezuela, the pair were arrested in Miami, Florida, pursuant to warrants issued by a Magistrate Judge in the Southern District of New York.

“The national security and public safety of our nation depends on an immigration system with integrity,” said Dalessandro. “We are restoring integrity through aggressive targeting of violent criminals and smuggling organizations that are motivated by pure greed and profit.”

A grand jury in the Southern District of New York has indicted SINGH, PATEL, and two other defendants — SUNIL KEWALRAMANI and GURDIAL SINGH PEGANY — for conspiring to smuggle aliens into the United States for commercial gain and financial advantage. According to court documents, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) agents in New York and in the Dominican Republic have been investigating the alleged alien smuggling operation of SINGH, PATEL, KEWALRAMANI, and PEGANY since 2003.

In about November 2004, SINGH, a resident of Venezuela, allegedly spoke by telephone on several occasions with an undercover ICE agent (the “UC”) about SINGH’s smuggling operation, calls that the UC recorded. During one such call, SINGH advised the UC that he was in the process of obtaining Venezuelan passports for smugglees because holders of Venezuelan passports are not required to possess a visa in order to enter the Dominican Republic, it was charged. In another conversation, SINGH allegedly discussed the various costs of smuggling his aliens into the United States.

It is alleged that SINGH subsequently sent two smugglees into the Dominican Republic in about January 2005. From there, the aliens were transported by ferry boat to Puerto Rico, where they subsequently took a commercial flight to John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City (“JFK Airport”), according to the charges.

Similarly, ICE agents acting in an undercover capacity allegedly learned that PATEL, a resident of Curacao, in the Dutch Antilles, had gathered in Curacao foreign nationals from various other countries for smuggling into the United States. SUNIL KEWALRAMANI, another resident of, and

the owner of a business in, Curacao, allegedly aided PATEL by supplying him with false “invitation letters” letters stating that PATEL’s smugglees were being employed by KEWALRAMANI’s business in order to get the smugglees into Curacao. From Curacao, the smugglees made their way to the Dominican Republic, where they stayed until final arrangements for their transportation into the United States could be made. Between February 2004 and January 2005, PATEL used the Dominican Republic as a staging area for sending 10 smugglees into the United States, it was charged. The first eight allegedly flew directly from the Dominican Republic into JFK Airport, while the last two were allegedly transported from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico via ferry boat and then flown to JFK Airport. The fourth defendant, GURDIAL SINGH PEGANY, a citizen of the United States and a resident of California, supplied funds to pay for the smugglees’ transport and for their food and lodging during this process, according to the charges.

SINGH and PATEL were scheduled to be arraigned today before United States Magistrate Judge HENRY B. PITMAN. KEWALRAMANI was arraigned previously. PEGANY was arrested in California and is awaiting transportation by the United States Marshals Service to New York. Their case has been assigned to United States District Judge SHIRA A. SCHEINDLIN. The defendants have been remanded to jail pending trial.

If convicted, each of the defendants faces a minimum sentence of 3 years and a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison without the possibility of parole.

Mr. KELLEY praised ICE and its agents in both New York and in the Dominican Republic for their investigation of this matter. Mr. KELLEY also thanked the Venezuelan Military Intelligence Directorate for its assistance in the arrests of SINGH and PATEL.

Assistant United States Attorneys ROBIN LINSEMAYER and W.S. WILSON LEUNG are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and each defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.